

**UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL
CENTER FOR LOWELL HISTORY
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTIONS**

**MOGAN CULTURAL CENTER
LOWELL NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK
UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

LAOTIAN SECRET WAR EXHIBIT

INFORMANT: KHAMMA PHASYSOMBOUNE

INTERVIEWERS: SARAH MORRISON AND MEHMED ALI

TRANSLATOR: KHUN PHATANA

DATE: JANUARY 20, 2008

S = SARAH

T = TRANSLATOR

A = ALI

K = KHAMMA

Tape 08.07

Note: “T” will be used to denote Translator’s voice, translating the questions asked of and the responses from the informant.

S: All right. This is Sarah Morrison interviewing Khamma Phasysomboune on January 20, 2008, along with (--)

T: Khun Phatana, translator, on January 20, 2008.

A: And Mehmed Ali is here of course.

S: Okay. Where and when were you born?

T: He was born in [Daxiang Dung, and Muong Mahasay, Kang Khammouan,], Tha Khaek, June 18, 1930.

S: Okay. Did he move around, or did he stay in the same area?

T: At the age of thirteen years old he attended school at [Muong], this means the city of [Mahasay] from his home town Tha Khaek.

S: When he was thirteen? (T: Umhm) Okay. Did his family move then, or did just he go somewhere else to school?

T: Two of his brothers went alone with him to study.

S: Okay. All right, so that was at what age again, thirteen?

T: At thirteen.

S: So that's when he started school? (T: Umhm) With his brothers? (T: Umhm) Okay. What did his parents do for work?

T: Farmers.

S: Farmers? (T: Umhm) What were his parents' names?

T: His parents (--) His father is [Tao Jang] and his mom is [May Jang Kong].

S: What are his grandparents' names on his dad's side?

T: Can't remember, too long.

S: Can't remember? Okay. What about his mother's side.

K: Same thing.

S: Same thing, can't remember? (T: Can't remember) Okay. So he mentioned two brothers. How many siblings did he have and what were their names?

T: He have five people in the family. Two women, three men including him, number three. And [Noi] is the big sister, and [Nankeo] is the smallest one, [Kumsy] is the bigger one, and him, [Padut], and [Gentila], those are the all female, all male brothers.

S: Okay. So he had, there are five total with him? But I thought he said he had two brothers.

T: Five, so six.

S: Okay. So there are two brothers, and there were two sisters.

T: Five, including him that's five. And two of the, two person lost, they die. They were diseased.

S: When they were kids?

T: Yah, they passed away, two of them. (S: Okay) They used to have seven.

S: Hm, okay. So I take it if he doesn't remember his grandparents, he doesn't remember the great grandparents then.

T: No, too long.

S: So could you just ask him what his childhood was like? Like what he remembers about it?

T: At that time at his boyhood he was student. At the same time he was during the World War II, and also during the French Occupation.

S: So he remembers that?

T: Yes, and it's about to become the beginnings of what you call civil war, become two party, different groups.

S: And what were the two parties?

T: Beginning between the French and Japanese [clears throat] Occupation.

S: Okay. What does he remember about that?

T: At that time his grandfather, his father was a headmaster chief of the town. And at that time he remember that the French and the Japanese came and fighting as his house.

S: At his house?

T: Umhm. That's what he remembers. They were using swords like, you know.

A: Using swords.

T: Yes, not shooting. So the French, he said the French [unclear] too close with the Japanese. So they were using guns and swords fighting each other.

S: So he saw this from his house (T: Yes) because he was right there.

T: Umhm, inside his house.

S: Was he scared?

T: He was you know, [unclear] and hiding behind the rice packs.

A: Which (--) Is this his village where he was born?

T: Yes. He was born [unclear], but this happened inside his house.

A: Inside his house?

T: Yes.

A: Really, not out on the street.

T: Not outside, inside his house.

S: Yah, they came.

T: Because the French slept at his father's house.

S: Was it because his father was the high chief? Is that why they went there? Or is it just happened there?

T: Yah, the reason, because his father was the protector of the peoples of that village or [bang], city. And the French, you know, respect his father. So they would stay at his house. Every soldier that came, the French soldier that came, they have to pass his father.

S: The French stayed with them?

T: Yes, the French stayed with them, because it was under French Occupation. So every city and town are under French.

S: Okay.

T: But they have to respect the [Probang]. The [Probang] means the Head Chief, just like a mayor.

S: Okay. So they came into the country, but they respected his dad because he was (--)

T: Yes, because French Occupation.

S: Okay. Now when was that?

T: The French, the Japanese, they came a second time. So it was 1942.

S: '42, so he was twelve?

T: Umhm, and three years before they seized fire, before the (--)

A: The end of the war?

T: Umhm

A: You said he said that the Japanese came twice?

T: Yah, they came. The first wave is (--) So it take about a year. I think they came 1940, (A: Okay) because 1940 was when the invasion of Japanese in Paris [unclear]. And then the French kicked them out and they come back second wave I think it's 1942 as he remembers.

A: So who won? This battle in the house, was that the first wave or the second wave?

T: The second wave of, in Paris Army.

A: And who, who won that battle?

T: [Laughs] It was nobody won, because it was like at the time, it's funny the story. The Japanese led Mahasay City, and the French side is on [clears throat] his father's side, led by his hometown. So two troubled chief live by two different force. And because there's nobody won, because he said that when you charge the knife into a body it doesn't penetrate. (S: No?) People say it's a superstition, but they have a magic trick for protection. And his father was what you call a peacemaker, not, you know, not (--) And he was in front of, in the middle of it, and they were [charging against him,] his body he said. But nobody won, so everybody is good.

S: And they just went back where they came from?

T: Yes.

S: And so, so when they (-) Who was, who was getting stabbed but not hurt? His dad, or everybody?

T: [Laugh] Yah, his father got stabbed, but none of them is (--) He saw that you know, he saw his father was like charging [unclear] not even penetrating his body. About ten minutes they were charging each other. Everybody [unclear]. And [Kong Sayse] left by the right side, and his father, the French left the left side of the door. So they all jump on the [unclear].

S: So no one got hurt then?

T: No one got hurt.

T: Because it is, you know, we all Laos. I have to fight each other. Still battle between his father and [Khumsay] from Mahasay. So this interesting battle between the Venice and Tuscany, you know.

S: Okay.

T: It's like George Washington. [Laughs]

S: Going into battle.

A: And so did, did he ever see the Japanese again?

T: It's only the defense. They haven't, never seen the Japanese since then.

S: Even though they came back, you didn't see them again?

T: Yah, they must [unclear] somewhere.

A: And so the French stayed with his family through the rest of the war?

T: They've been there for a long time, you know, since 1878, but like I said, they came back. They stayed there because it's their Occupation.

A: Right. But I'm saying after that battle did the French stay with his family?

T: They left. That night they just happened to be at his father's house, but they left [in the base].

S: Oh okay, so they didn't live there.

A: Okay.

S: Okay. All right, so he mentioned, he talked about going to school. He mentioned he went to school at thirteen. When did he stop going to school?

T: Stop, right?

S: Yah, so he went from thirteen until what age? And then what did he do after that?

T: He went back after the war. So he went back. Basically he studied until sixteen, but he had to stop because the war. He went back home to help his mom with the farm.

S: Which war? World War?

T: World War II.

S: World War II. Okay, so he only went for like three years, and then he went back to help? (T: Umhm) Okay, now what was that like? What did he have to help with, and (-)

T: He's more like the big person in the family. So he have to (--) But his big brother, he was small, and then he is the small brother, he's big, so they depend on him [Laughs] to do the farming, all the stuff.

S: Oh okay. Now where was his dad at this time? What was his father doing?

T: They were together.

S: They were together. They just needed more help?

T: Yup.

S: Okay. Now how did the, how did the war affect them then, other than him having to leave school?

T: At that time of the difficulties that, you know, and he saw many things. And the wars, he said that the Laos of the surrenders of Japanese. So there's a lot of Japanese went, because in Laos they call Lipi, the southern of Laos. When you, it's just like Niagara Fall. So you kind of come down, the water come down and then drop. (S: And drops) So pretty much they killed themselves by riding (--)

S: The Japanese.

T: Umhm. They did not know neither there's a drop at Niagara Falls.

A: They were on boats?

T: On the boat.

A: What was the name of the place where the falls are?

T: They call Lipi, (A: Lipi?) yah, the southern of Laos. At the end, Lipi is end of Laos. It dropped down.

S: So the Japanese are in the boat you said.

T: They return home, but at the same they did not know there's a big fall.

S: Okay. So I thought they wanted to drop down. You said something (--)

T: No, it's more, you can it's a suicide, because you know, they've been Occupation in that area for awhile, but he say that they were disheartened because they lost the war.

S: Right.

T: So you can say it was a suicide mission, or they didn't know.

S: Okay, so this is at the end of the war then, and they, okay.

T: And then at the same time it's aggression, it's more aggression for North Vietnamese, the forming of (--) At the same time it was aggression to the French. When the Japanese left the French returned, and then there's a formation of independence, a nation. So that's a big, what you call, anti-sentiment to the French return. So they were recruiting army. They were recruiting for Vietnam. It was like anti-sentiment, at the time they formed the nation of Indochina, become independent of French. So the Vietnam came to recruit people to join armies.

S: Okay. So the Japanese were leaving, they left, and then the French came back. Now how long had the French been gone?

T: They never left.

S: Okay. They just, did they have reinforcement? I mean were there just more of them coming in, or (--)

A: Now the Vietnamese had come, they were coming to Laos to recruit Laos people to fight against the French, right?

T: Basically it was, it was, I think it's the, I think it was like they're helping each other with what they call Indochina. So basically Vietnam came into Laos, said, "Hey, we want you to fight the French." So they tried to go toward the French in Laos as well too.

A: Yah.

T: He was like (--) Pretty much it's like the French came in 1893 and occupy, but they signed a treaty. So basically from 1893 to 1947 they signed a treaty a Laos become independent in 1947, after the World War II. But they returned, you see what I mean? They break the treaty.

S: They broke it, yah.

T: It was a treaty, signed it in 1947. (S: Right) But then they came back.

S: The French came back.

T: That's why the Vietnam recruiting Laos people to fight the French.

S: Now when the Vietnamese came, did he meet Vietnamese people? Did they come to his village?

T: Pretty much like the entire French, they were outside. The French soldiers are inside the city. They're inside the city, occupy the city. (A: Yup) And then the Vietnam, the [defectors] right, [defectors], they were outside. So they didn't recruit farmers, the pheasant right, the poor farmers. (A: The pheasants) So they recruit those people.

A: So he wasn't living (--) He was living in the town? (T: The town) Okay. And were those Vietnamese at that time, were they communist?

T: It was (--) Saigon is still not communist. (A: Okay) They just want to be [unclear]. Saigon is still not this side, because Hanoi is, it is communist because of the Soviet Union. But Saigon is not yet at that time. So the Saigon people, southern of Vietnam, come to recruit. Hey, you know, we got to do something.

S: And that was in the late 40s, '47 and '48?

T: Yes.

A: And when did he first hear of Laos people being communist?

T: It's funny he said, after World War II there's a (--) After World War II, 1945 you see, you know, the knew group of people, the Vietnamese, they come to recruit people. That's how he realized there was, not fighting yet, but as recruiting, you know, propaganda. Advertising, recruiting about the good thing about Communist. So basically because farmers, and outside, countryside people, they were less educated about the Communist, about the opportunities. So the city people have, they know, you know, what westerns and the future. So Vietnamese are recruiting the people who are poor, farmers, less education, to listen to them. He remembers there was a lady, her name [Nang Pankse], who was their recruiter.

A: She was Laos?

S: A lady?

T: She as Laos too, recruiter for Vietnamese.

T: And the other Vietnamese guy named [Lang Nyeng Jiang]

A: Did he ever meet these people?

T: They were friends with his sister, (A: Really) and tried to recruit her. [Laughs] Infiltration of the family. But since nobody can help, you know, if she went to join them there's nobody help them to do the farming. So she'd have to stay.

S: Did they try to get him too?

T: Not yet. It's not the story yet. (S: Oh okay) Not yet. So basically they, you know, they almost, that's almost like a whole bunch of people from his town, young, were recruited out.

A: They were recruited out.

T: Umhm.

A: They left the town?

T: Umhm, 1945. In 1946 there were a bunch of them gaining the interest of the people. So that's beginning.

S: To go with the Communist?

T: Yes. It's more like Minutemen. [Chuckles]

S: So if he went to school from thirteen to sixteen, and then he went back to work on the farm, and all of this was going on (T: Going on), did he ever go back to school?

T: Still in World War, still in, it's more like Vietnam. (S: Right, okay. Yes.) The beginning of war for the independence.

S: Umhm. All right. So what happened there? Did (--) What was his first job? Did he get into the military? Did they recruit him, or?

T: So beginning, the end of 1946, the end of 1946 French and Laos formed the, had the base nearby his hometown. So they left the town. They left the town and formed the base outside the town rather than inside the town.

S: Oh okay.

T: So they called the front, the front army.

A: The front army? Did the whole village move inside the base, or just the soldiers?

T: So basically they moved their, you know, the station to be you know, in front of the town, outside, rather than inside to protect us.

A: I have to run off. I'll be back though. So you guys continue.

S: All right. So what year was that again? Was that 19 (--)

T: End of 1946.

S: '46, okay. And then so what happened from there?

T: Basically the French saw there's a lot of people from Vietnam to recruit young, young men. So the French began to do the same thing, recruiting sixteen up to twenty-five.

S: Did they recruit him?

T: They want his father, but then he went to replace his father.

S: He replaced his father? So he went instead of his father?

T: Umhm.

S: So then he was fighting for what cause again? Which side was he fighting with?

T: On the French side.

S: On the French side, against Communist?

T: Yes. He was what do you call, the military hospital, nurse.

S: Oh he was a nurse? He worked in the hospital?

T: All in hospital, the military, started with the unit, the French Military Unit in the base.

S: So that's what he started doing? And how old was he then?

T: About seven, into seventeen.

S: Seventeen. So he was very young. At that point did he belong to a political party?

T: No, they just stayed with the French because they were of the French Occupation.

S: Okay. So he (--)

T: None of them joined the Communist.

S: Okay, so what he a Loyalist then?

T: Rise to the French.

S: To the French. Okay. All right, can you just talk a little bit about (--) So you were seventeen, and he was, he started off, then he was with the French and he was working in hospitals as a nurse. Can you just talk, go from there and talk about his experience, and how long he was with the French, and what he did throughout?

T: At the (--) During his one years until 1947 he is (--) Beginning in 1947 then his base was moved to [[Paquay]], borders of Laos and Vietnam, one unit, (S: Okay, what was?) about a thousand, ten thousand, ten thousand soldiers; six thousand French. The total of seven thousand is the French, [Hispaniols] and Saigon troop, (S: Okay) and then three thousand Laos.

S: Now they moved from where to where?

T: From the, I think it's from outside base, from other unit, from [Mahasay] Unit Base to the borders.

S: To the border. The border of Laos and (T: border of Laos and Vietnam) Vietnam. Okay.

T: That's [Paquay]. That's [Paquay].

S: That's the name of it? (T: Umhm) Okay. Now what was the name of, or the number of the unit?

T: He say there's about 6,000 French, and then 1,000 Hispanics in Saigon troop, and 3,000 Laos army.

S: Right, but was there, you know, how (--) Was it like number 205 group, or number, you know?

T: The 1st Infantry is by French, and the 6th Division Infantry is Laos Army, it's made of him. (S: Division, okay) So he's on the 6th Division.

S: 6th Division, okay.

T: Infantry he thinks.

S: Okay. So after they moved to the border, what happened? What did they do? And what year was this?

T: I think it's the beginning of 1947.

S: '47? Okay.

T: When he was there it was the [My Loum Bang], is the mountain. (S: Okay) The mountain that's spread between Vietnam and the base, the French base. [My Loum Bang], that means the tree. (S: Oh the tree) The tree, because it's mountain. So they came to invade, they invaded, 100,000 Vietnamese troop came to fight them.

S: 100,000 came to fight how many of them at that point?

T: 100,000 come to fight 10,000.

S: 100,000 verses 10,000?

T: Yes, that's what they only got, 10,000 for three months. They don't have a lot of gun, but they have a lot of peoples, but they have a lot of gun.

S: Okay.

T: The French have everything. (S: Umhm) They have air support and a lot of machine gun, but Vietnamese they have a lot of manpower, but not a lot of (--)

S: So were the Vietnamese mainly on foot then coming over?

T: They walked.

S: They walked and they didn't have many weapons.

T: No car, walk. They have the stuff belong with them.

S: Yah, backpack type of thing.

T: Backpack, yes.

T: Thirteen years old. For us they are sixteen years old, seventeen years old. But there, thirteen years old, little kid.

S: Aaah, they were younger than him?

T: Umhm, yup.

S: And so you said that his side had more, the French had the air. So did they have planes flying? (T: Yes) Bombing at all, or what were they doing? Shooting?

T: They had bombs.

S: All right, and this is in the mountain area.

T: Umhm. Even though sometimes he say, when they were fighting they call up that you know, we control this area, but the French still dropping the bomb on them.

S: Oh, so (--)

T: So basically, and then of course they went and asked for you know, we need our support, right, and then they went in and take over that, and then too late to call up.

S: Yah. So the Vietnamese were saying this, they said, "We're taking over."

T: No, on their side.

S: Oh on their side. Okay.

T: They were like on friendly fire. The targeting. So basically only Laos soldiers are at the full front. So the story now, go back to it, Unit 205. So basically the Laos soldiers went in first.

S: Okay, all right. And so he wasn't part of that though? Or was he?

T: He was part of that.

S: He was.

T: Umhm.

S: Like the guy yesterday, Sivilay?

T: Yes. So he was in Division Number 6.

S: He was in Division 6.

T: [Unclear] Infantry.

S: Okay. So how did that battle go? You said that there were many more of the Vietnamese coming over, but what happened in the battle, casualties?

T: So basically that's the rule. If you went up, if you went up to fight, and then you take over the Vietnamese post, then stay there, let them bomb first, but they (--) So because that's a town they have to bomb the area. If you were there they were unlucky, most of them, because they were not there (--) Yah, they shouldn't, what he's saying, when you disperse the Vietnamese troops you never want to be at the same place where they disperse.

S: Okay.

T: Otherwise the plane (--)

S: Oh, oh, okay.

T: Because they're afraid that, because remember, the Vietnamese are recruiting Laos as well, so you don't know who is who. So they don't believe it, but if you know the rules, you don't want to be there.

S: So you don't, they didn't want to fight head to head then?

T: I think the first, like he said, if you know the rule [in case] already, say that's a Vietnamese station right there, and you went and dispersed them, you don't want to be in the same place where they are. (S: Right) Because the rule said if you there, there will be air support.

S: So they were, okay, so they were afraid that their guys, the French would be bombing that area. (T: Yes, umhm) So they don't want to be near the Vietnamese, because (--)
(T: Yes, yup) Yet they had to fight each other, right? So?

T: Yah, you have to wait, then he say you have to wait for the plane.

S: Okay, to drop, (T: Yah) and then you go and take care of the rest.

T: Yup, because sometime what happen if you, he said that sometimes there's infiltration. (S: Umhm) So you might caught him as a liar. They say, "I need help," you know, and then someone, when they come by they shoot at them. (S: Okay) So that's why they have to bomb the area first. But his unit, his 6th Division, went up there and replaced, and stayed there, and then they mistaken bomb.

S: Do what happened when that, when the bomb came?

T: They were in, they were in [unclear], (S: Trench?) trench. They were in the [unclear], in the hole.

S: So he was okay.

T: He was okay.

S: What about the other guys?

T: Nobody gets hurt.

S: Nobody got hurt?

T: Nope.

S: From him, and his (--).

T: Because they went up north. Not the whole like, it was about 100 people, a hundred soldiers went up there.

S: Okay. Did the Vietnamese get hurt?

T: Umhm.

S: And where was this again? This is in the mountain area?

T: This is [Paquay]. It's about one kilometer from the base.

S: Okay.

T: [Paquay], that's where they fight. [Paquay] is like more the base area. And then they went up there 100 meters, kilometers, to fight.

S: Okay. So what happened after that? Did he go back to the base, or did they go on another mission?

T: So basically he stayed there. After they fought that place (--) So they won that battle, [Notbair], and 100 people stayed. And the following day they dropped food and supplies to them.

S: Okay, and he was one of the 100 that stayed?

T: Yes, he was one of them.

S: Now what did he have to fight with? Did he have gun with him? Did he have hand grenades to go with him?

T: He had supply medicines, medicines and machine guns, grenades.

S: Machine guns, everything?

T: Umhm.

S: Him and his company. Okay. Now, so that was still in the late 40s then, right? '47?

T: '47, still '47.

S: '47, okay. Can you talk a little bit about, because we can't go year by year, it would take a long time, but can he kind of jump ahead of it and talk a bit about maybe a few years (--) I mean how, how long was he in that company I guess? That would be a first question.

T: You mean as a soldier, right?

S: Yah, with that unit.

T: This is funny, when they're up there, they went up there for three days, replace that [Notbair]. That's where they won. So afterward the Vietnamese came back.

S: Oh, okay.

T: It is very interesting. So basically they take [Notbair] where the Vietnamese place for three days. They return 100,000 people, their 100 unit fought back, but the Vietnamese died the most, however they had to retrieve to the base, to [Paquay].

S: Oh, so his unit had to go back to the base?

T: Return, retreat.

S: Retreat.

T: They have more people than us. They had 100,000 people, they only 100.
[Chuckles]

S: 100, oh my god!

T: So they will retreat. About ten soldiers died from 100.

S: Hm, from his.

T: So there were about, from 100 they died about 10, retreat. They probably die about 10,000, ours 100,000.

S: Wow, and only ten of theirs?

T: Ten of theirs.

T: Because they have air support too.

S: Oh, right, right. Were they like running through the mountain trying to get out of there?

T: Yes. They have the big gun support from [Paquay], from the base, but no way it can be done, 100,000! [Laughs]

S: Yah. So they made it back, and then to the base, and what happened? Did they (--)

T: After they return to base they chased them to [Paquay] too, those 100,000.
[Laughing] So within three days those Vietnamese troop (--) So within three days they come back, (S: They came back again?) yah, they chased them to the base too.
[Laughing].

S: Out of their base?

T: Yah, they retreat to their base [Paquay], right, but those 100,000 people, well 190,000 still coming.

S: So they made it all the way there?

T: Seven days, seven nights.

S: Wow. So they fought back and forth for all of that time?

T: Yah, umhm.

S: And then so how many of his were left in the end?

T: The seven days, the seven nights, seven days, basically they lost the battle.

S: They lost the battle.

T: So they lost the battle of [Paquay].

S: So is that when he was taken prisoner of war, or was that at another point?

T: Um, no I think that's later on.

S: That's later on?

T: So they retreat back to the headquarter Mahasay. From Mahasay to [Paquay]. So now they lost the battles of [Paquay]. (S: Okay) And he just, the entire 100,000, they have 100,000 people.

S: Right, afterwards.

T: So they were (--) Well they, they have only 10,000. They have only 10,000 soldiers in [Paquay].

S: Oh his side?

T: Yes. Because remember 6,000 French, (S: Oh, right, yeah) umhm. So now (--) Out of 6,000 they only have only 3,000 French soldiers left. And then his [unclear], about 2,000. So they lost about 1,000. The French lost about 3,000, and (--) They both fighting and retreat, fighting and retreat.

S: Yah, back and forth.

T: Uh huh. So there's battles between, so the lost battles of [Paquay].

T: Never stop. (S: Never stopped) They never stopped. Remember they have 190,000.

S: Right.

T: About 10,000 people. They have to (--) He said he was like even retreat they're still fighting about (--) Even after several days they would like retreat, within a day, they come back.

S: So when did that finally end then? After the third day, or after seven days?

T: About two or three months.

S: Two or three months? Okay.

T: To reach the headquarters at Mahasay. So they, they were reloc... the unit will relocate to [Bahna, Bahna Pakon], the secondary base.

S: Okay. Now was he in that unit for his whole military career?

T: Still there's the secondary unit, [Bahna Pakon,] he was there. Out of that 3,000 French soldiers, and 2,000, they all combine. They reunite.

S: Okay. To reinforce?

T: So they diversified half of the unit. (S: Oh, okay) So that all divert. One unit divert to Mahasay, one unit is in [Bahna Pakon.]

S: And that's where he was?

T: Umhm, that's where he is.

S: Okay. Now how long was his military career?

T: Can't, because there's still more.

S: Right, but how many (--)

T: You want to make short cut? Of how long he been in the military?

S: Yah, I mean how many years was he in the military total?

T: Until 1975.

S: Until 1975.

T: He didn't want to stop the story. He was (--) The sad thing is that they came back, the Vietnamese, those Vietnamese unit came back after them to the secondary base. So they only have like only 3,000 French, Laos and the Coalition. They have only three thousand left.

S: 3,000 out of the 10,000 they started with.

T: Yes, uh huh. So.

S: Okay. So the Vietnamese came after them again, to the second place.

T: Again. They were surrounded.

S: Surrounded, okay.

T: And they fight all the way to the headquarter. So he was, they was, they got captured.

S: They got captured. Okay. So that was?

T: 1947.

S: So he's still only seventeen when he got captured. Okay. Can you talk about that?

T: He got captured, but then they asked him, "Do you know anybody?" He said, "Yah, I know Pankse." You don't remember Pankse? She was recruiter for the Communist. So he said, "Yah, I know Pankse." So now they said, so they, you know, instead of being, him put in prison, they make him as a recorder, go along with her.

S: With her? Oh okay.

T: And basically he can sing, he can sing in Vietnamese. [Laughs]

S: He can sing?

T: He can sing.

S: In Vietnamese.

T: Umhm.

T: So he can sing, because using his talent as a singer to recruit people.

S: Oh, okay. So they went around Laos?

T: Yah, if he don't go they're going to kill him.

S: Umhm.

T: But the French, the other French were captured. They had no other options.

S: Right.

T: Remember that Pankse knows his sisters. (S: Right) They were good friends. So she spared him.

S: Him, umhm. Wow.

T: So that's the end of 1947.

A: Did he actually go recruiting for awhile?

T: About four months.

S: Four months, with her?

T: All day, all night. So it's part of the fear of being captured.

S: Umhm, along with her he went, right?

T: Four months. He take her for four months.

S: So what happened after that?

T: So he says that's the end of 1947.

S: So was that the end of military, or?

T: That's the end of the French military. (S: French) Eventually he got captured and then he can no longer [unclear]. They didn't allow it. That's it.

S: So what did he do from there? I mean he recruited for awhile with her, and that was the end of '47.

T: That's the end of being a French soldier.

S: Right, did he go back home?

T: He was recruiting. At that time he was recruiting for three months, but that fourth month he got home.

S: He went home? (T: Umhm) Okay. And what did he do there? Did he go to work? Did he work on the farm, or?

T: He say when you're captured you have to join them to [recruit,] but at the same time he was smart enough to join them to survive. It's about surviving here.

S: Right.

T: When he missed his home he said, "I'm not going," that's it, with the Vietnamese.

S: So.

T: But he doesn't like them anyway. The reason he joined them, become recruiter, was to survive.

S: Was to survive, right. But you said he went home after that. So then he left the Vietnamese? He said, "That's it, I'm not (--)"

T: Doing anymore.

S: And did they come after him? Did they (--)

T: Because Pankse is remember, is the head of Laos recruiters of the area. And then his sister tell Pankse, said, "Hey, my brother, we need a lot of help from my brothers." So they just kind of backed off.

S: Oh, okay. So because the connection there, she was able to keep them (--)

T: Umhm, yah.

T: At the same time the last month of his you know, legacy, they say remember that Mahasay is still his headquarter base, [Ban Pong]. Those unit that fought them, they came back to the headquarter now the last month. So they continue invasion, continue [unclear]. Out of 100,000 Vietnamese troop, there's only 3,000 left. (S: Wow) Only 3,000. So that's the last battle of Mahasay, because that's where their headquarters. Remember they moved from town, out from town, to Mahasay. And this is the last battle. So Vietnamese only left 3,000 of 100,000. (A: Really?) They got gun, they thought they would take over [Ban Kuai]. You know [Ban Kuai,] that's not on base. So they take over that. So they got gun from where they left. Because they have the gun, like ten people for one gun. Now they have friends' guns, you know, they found them.

S: Oh, right, right.

T: So that unit (--) But after they've been beaten by those units, Vietnamese units. Remember now they no longer have a unit. They were captured and everybody went everywhere. But he learned that his former soldiers still retreat back to Mahasay. But then those, out of 100,000 come before them again at the headquarters, only 3,000 people left according to what he learned from other people.

S: Okay. What did he say?

T: Basically what he said same story.

S: Oh okay, (T: Yah, repeating) just repeating. Okay. All right. So if he was back home around that time, what did he do in the 50s? Did he farm? Did he (--)

T: 1948.

S: Right, but from then on what (--)

T: From 18, 18 years old, 1948.

S: What did he do though? Did he work?

T: Basically the Vietnamese insurgence, they, of 3,000 people there's only 300 left.

S: So what happened to the 300?

T: They just left. Of 3,000 they have only 300 people left. Those 300 people live in his town now.

S: Oh in his town?

T: Because remember Pankse? Yes. So now the Vietnamese live in his town now.

S: The Vietnamese lived in his town?

T: Yes.

S: Not the people he fought with?

T: Yes, the people he fought with now live in the same town.

S: Right, because they were captured by the Vietnamese. (T: Yes) And then they moved to his town.

T: Umhm.

S: Because of Pankse.

T: Yes, because Pankse. So basically the French beat them now. They lost the battle.

S: Right, after all that time.

T: So they lost the battle of [Ban Kuai], and now in Mahasay the Vietnamese lost all the (--). So.

S: Okay. So what happened from there? He, did he stay at home? Did he leave home again?

T: So basically at that same time, because these 300 retreat and live in his town, the French came back and burned, shutdown the entire village.

S: The whole village where he lived?

T: These 300 Vietnamese knew ahead so they left, but the French came in and shutdown the entire (--) At night time, shutdown a whole village. It was the last invasion.

S: That was the last invasion with the French at that time?

T: Yah, the French [unclear] by all the Vietnamese. They don't want to let them in a single person. Seven planes came around 6:00 p.m. So the French came in and dropped the bomb. Six planes dropped the bomb to all the house. Three hundred house, one hundred houses burned down from the six planes. Still, that's still a memory back, still what do you call?

A: Crater?

T: Craters.

T: Two of them did not explode, still there.

A: Today?

T: That's today.

S& A: Wow.

T: It depends on hit the sand, hit the dirt, hit the rock. So he said them hit, went, impact differently. The one hit the sand does not impact.

A: I'm sorry. So when they bombed this would have been 1940...?

T: End of '47. That's it. It was December.

T: The last battle. That's the last battle of French, French war.

S: In the whole country?

T: Umhm. 1947 is the end of it. (A: Okay) That's the end of it. So 1947 there was a treaty for Laos to become independent. (S: Right)

T: So they left for Laos to fight for Laos. [Unclear] and Laos Liberation. [Unclear] Liberation on the French Occupation. Now they left for the Laos to fight for those communist. So they sign.

A: So what did he do when he returned home? Did he just farm, or did he go back into the military?

T: Three people die, six people hurt from the village that night. So after the treaty is done and everything, you know, he came back as a farm work again, helping out with mom and dad for one year. Getting over 18 years old, and then they don't want him to fight anymore. So he kind of like go back to school as a student in Mahasay. So he went back to school in 1948 to '53 with, it was still French school. French teacher, even though it was liberation, but still French school.

S: Now his town was the one that was bombed though, right?

T: Yes.

S: Okay, so what happened to him and his family then? Did they have to leave and go somewhere else?

T: They still there, because there's only [100 town] were destroyed.

S: Okay. So they were okay? His family was okay?

T: They were okay. So that year 1948, his father passed away and they decide, he decided to go back to school to study French.

S: To study what? What did he study? Anything in particular?

T: He studied French.

S: French. (T: Just French) French the language, or history, or both?

T: Just the French, the French language.

S: Okay, for five years?

T: For five years.

S: Hm, okay. And was that? What town was that in?

T: Mahasay. He went up to 1953. He still continued to study French in Tha Khaek, (S: In Tha Khaek) not in Mahasay, but Tha Khaek, the larger city now.

S: Okay. So what is (--)

T: Until 1957.

S: Oh wow, okay.

T: Long time as student. Study French since, he pretty much studied French.

S: So what did he do with his French knowledge after he was finished with school?

T: So basically, it's funny, after he finished the school, because he still continued until 1957, and then 1957 to 1959 the French gave the authority to the American in Paris. So they get the Occupation to American rather than the French. So now they want, they're recruiting as police officers, military police. It's more like military police.

A: Yup. Were the Americans recruiting?

T: Yes Americans recruiting. So they're recruiting for police officers whom are the formers. There's eighty-one of them. Because eighty-one of them are the remember, the French, former French soldiers, because they recognize the French. So he was one of the eighty-one former soldiers, as a French soldier. So his name was there because he's well-educated in French, and they were loyal to French. So he was on the list to take the test. Of eighty-one people fourteen people were accepted and passed the exams. (S: Was he?) And he was one of them. He was number one. (S: Wow) Remember he studied French all the words? [Laughs]

S: Yah right. Yah, very smart.

T: So he studied, he went to study as a police officer from '57 to '59.

S: And where was that? What town?

T: Tha Khaek.

S: Tha Khaek, okay.

T: And then from '57 to '59 he studied police officer in Tha Khaek, but he went to continues to get promoted to the high rank. So 1959 he moved to Vientiane. And so they were on (--) Now 1959 they were, well, police officers. And within three months of beginning of that training he was rank #3, and because of his ranking they asked him to become trainer, become permanently trainer in that.

S: Trainer in 1959. So he accepted that?

T: So he's a police officer instructor; Kwando, and boxing, and more defensive instructor.

S: And how long did he do that for?

T: So basically from 1959 to 60s as a training instructor until August 9, 1960. There was a civil war. One of the Lieutenant, remember the Neutral? The Neutral side right. So he's a Neutral. Now a civil war between different parties.

A: So really there was three (T: parties) parties (S: Three parties) after 1960?

S: Okay.

T: So basically in Vientiane, while he was in Vientiane, Kong Le take over the capitol. This party take over. (S: The Neutral took) He seized all of the powers, all the militaries, all the police officers, all you know, all different parties. So he take over that.

S: Who took over?

T: Kong Le, one of the Lieutenant.

A: Remember last night they were talking about the Neutral, (S: Right, is that what he) not the, for the King, but not for the communist. The military guy kind of had a coo and took over power.

S: Oh that's right, okay.

A: Now was he funded by the CIA?

T: CIA, and the United States recognized by Geneva.

S: Right.

A: And how did he feel about that coo?

T: Basically when they seized that night, when they seized he, when they seized they have propaganda, news [unclear]. So he read about it. And then that night you know, they know they were seized. You know, they have to surrender. So the people at least police [unclear]. Basically most of the top senior people left the base to their wife and family. There's only 300 left now, and Kong Le called the base and said, "Are you going to fight us, or are you going to join us?" You know, remember Kong Le live by Prince Souvanakouma, he's the Prince who lead the Neutral, from Neutral, not joining the Communist, or not joining the, the American side, or American side, but they were, want to be Neutral but still got supported from the United States as Neutral, because they were recognized by Geneva. So they call them up, "Are you going to join us, or fight?" They said, "We give you five minutes. So yes or no?" [Laughs]

S: So what happened?

T: So basically he told his, remember he and the instructors, all the commanders [unclear] they left. So he wish all the police officers are stationed, ready to prepare to fight, but not. And he said, "We are the Laos people, we shouldn't fight. So let's negotiate." And he never seen Kong Le before. So let's meet.

A: So he was the one.

S: Yah, he was coordinating?

T: Yes, umhm.

T: He's the coordinator. So they're all seniors, the senior officer left.

S: They left, right, so he took upon himself.

T: He can't, because they can come, or they cannot go back to the base. Remember the whole city was cooked. So when they're cooked you just cannot come back to the base. So they send the junior staff to negotiate with him. So basically (--) So the guy who came [with the tank] with junior staff is, his name Pang, but not the other lady, but the guy, but this guy live in same town with him. They were living in the same town.

A: They grew up in the same village?

T: Yah. So his name Pang. So this guy comes the [tank].

S: And he was on the Neutral?

T: He's on the Neutral side.

S: And he came to negotiate.

T: Umhm. The [tank] is like with a bullet. His friend fly, it's like from Tha Khaek to Vientiane. And his tank is riddled of bullet hole.

A: It's riddled with bullet holes?

T: Yah.

S: Wow.

T: He said, "You know I'm the commander in here, you know, here's my base." And he said, and his friend, "What are you doing over here?" And he said, "There's my base, there's my commander post." And he said, "You go tell your boss, you know, we won't fight." Basically, so he is different from other groups. They did not take his weapons, or any weapons, because he's the national police. He's the police training.

S: He is. So they didn't (--)

T: Because they're not soldiers. They not fight for nobody here. They are the [they serve the citizens]. So they left without.

S: So he left without controversy or anything.

T: Because they serve the people, took care of the people. They're not at war with nobody. So they left, the police.

S: So what became of that? Did they (--)

T: So after the [unclear] it takes awhile for the police officer who left the base to come back. Take time to come.

S: But they did come back?

T: They all came back. They all came back.

S: Was it somewhat back to normal then?

T: Normal.

S: Oh okay. So we're in the 60s at this point, right? So does he have any recollections of the Secret War when they were, Laos was being bombed by the Americans to chase out the Communists?

T: They're still. He says he cannot go to that one yet, because there's impact on the next, because still with political solution.

S: Oh okay.

T: So basically because this, we go back to the Secret War, but at the same time because military solution wasn't successful between political parties. Remember United States are counting on the political solution, but they not get nowhere. (S: Right) That's why the bomb have to be [unclear]. So basically in Vientiane they captured General Ma. He was, he was um, he was (--). He surrenders and they kill him, General Ma.

A: And he was from the Royal Government?

T: Ah, from the same side. General Ma is more like, General Ma is the [unclear]. General Ma is the control of air force, but he wants neither side to be down. He want, General Ma wants united force, united army, united front, but he have to, he have to capture either the Neutral or the Rightest. But he's unsuccessful of capturing both of them. So he got captured by himself. He got captured and then they killed him.

A: Who killed him though, the Neutral, or?

S: Yah, who captured him?

T: The Neutral. So the Neutral brought them down. So basically the air force (--). Remember different party have different (--). So he's on the Air Force side, and the Army Side. The Army side take him down, the Air Force guy. So then, and then at the

same time General Sihouk, one of the well-known Generals, brought his unit from Tha Khaek, and to fight the Neutral. The Neutral surrender and left Tha Khaek and went to middle of Vientiane. So at this time the United States cannot count on the Laos army. So they have to do something.

S: Okay. All right.

T: You see what I mean? Connected, because Laos military are weak and they're fighting each other, civil war.

S: Right. So that's when the United States stepped in.

T: They have to do something.

S: Because that wasn't working.

T: Yes. Instead go fighting those people, they fight their own, each other.

S: Right, okay.

T: But it's connected. So Kong Le, Kong Le troops, you know, they've been wiped out. So they fall back and stay with his, are now using his camp, police camp as the base. So he said, you know, "[unclear] my base," you know, because this is for the national protection, not for (--) So he told Kong Le to leave.

A: Was the leader of the Neutral (--)

T: Yah, he told the leader of Neutral to leave, "Leave my camp."

A: So the leader of the Neutral with his army actually came to his base?

T: Yes. And he said, "Look, leave."

S: So did they?

A: So he met, he met the leader.

T: Yes, three days he stayed with him, and he told him to leave. [Ban Khun], so they went to [Ban Khun]. Said, "Leave and go elsewhere to [Ban Khun]."

S: And they did? They left? (T: And they went) Really?

T: So he left to [Ban Khun].

S: So he listened to them. [Chuckles]

T: Yah, because there's like you know, a police training camp, not for (--)

S: Not for yah, military.

T: Umhm. And General Sihouk, now the General Sihouk fight up to Vientiane. Remember Vientiane is captured by Kong Le, and Sihouk was fighting up, up, up. So now Sihouk, General Sihouk come to his camp, [unclear].

S: Wow, so now the other one comes.

T: Yes, uh huh.

S: And so what happened there?

T: So Sihouk captured Vientiane now.

A: And he represents the Royalist, or the Right Wing.

T: Umhm. So basically now, now Sihouk captured Vientiane and at the same time they want him to lead the police command, the Police Officer's Command Post. They said, "Why we are fighting each other? Let's do something." So when, and then they want Sihouk to command the Police Unit. And then [name unclear], General [name unclear] is on the American side. [Name Unclear] is on the American side, and then Sihouk is on the Rightist, Royalist. And it's amazing how Sihouk, General Sihouk, he's only 100 people of manpowers and he fought that [Tha Khaek]. So now this in American negotiation right now. You have an American representative, General [Name unclear] you have the Royalist Army, Royalist side, Sihouk. So now they negotiate [unclear]. Now they become military police. He has become, now they merge, become a military police. So he's the leader, the senior officer of (--)

S: He is?

T: Umhm. (S: Okay) Sihouk now is the head of the police force now.

S: So Sihouk and his men combined (T: combined) with the police.

T: So now he's the head of the military, and Sihouk is the head of police. So they kind of swap.

A: Oh, he became the head of the military?

T: Head of military.

A: And Sihouk became the head of the police.

T: Umhm.

A: Did he become a higher ranking officer?

T: Four Star.

A: He became a General?

T: Not General. (A: Colonel?) Colonel, yes, Four Star Colonel, yes.

[Looking at document, or photo]

A: That's when he's the Head?

T: Yah, he was the Head. Yah, this is senior, this is Colonel.

A: What year is this now?

T: '61,'62 at this point, and he was, when the Sihouk captured (--) He's more like a what it's called, Jaguar? Military lawyer, military, any investigation, any problems in the military.

A: So jag.

T: Jag. Yes, he's one of that.

A: That was what his job was?

T: His job was.

S: How long did he do that for?

T: About a year. (S: A year?) About a year. (S: Okay) Again, remember Sihouk captured Vientiane and he said, "I'm going to lead the police, and then you lead the military." Remember [Name unclear], he's the one on American side, who make the decision, right. [Name unclear] said, because he's on the American side. So the American side said, "Hey." [Name unclear] said, you know, "Let's give, let's seized the power from Sihouk back, then these people police officer back their duty and responsibility. That's what they're trained to do, right?" So [name unclear] can recapture Vientiane, restructure back, everything back to the way it is. So he was on (--) Sihouk left to Thailand now, and then [name unclear] take over the authority of Vientiane, the capitol. Then he was, get back his position back as the police officer's instructor.

S: Okay.

T: Because that's not his job, military.

S: Right.

A: So how did he feel about being flipped twice?

T: He said to survive you have to go with the flow. They want you to do something, just do what they say, because you know you're less superior. They are the superiors. Remember [name unclear] are living by American, you know, and so just like Iraq. So you do what your boss say. So now, now the, the Legacy War started now, okay. So Vang Pao is supported by CIA. Now, so now the Vang Pao (--) So now (--) So Vang Pao and [name unclear], remember [name unclear] is, General [name unclear] is supported by United States. Now they are working together with Vang Pao the monk.

A: Oh he was a monk?

T: Yah. So now American make Vang Pao as a Lieutenant Colonel to lead the northern, to lead the CIA operation. Now the story [unclear]. And [name unclear] is also on the same side fighting the [unclear], and then Vang Pao is the secret operation [unclear]. Vang Pao, now we are in a Vang Pao in a situation of American hire Vang Pao to led the Secret, the Secret War now.

A: Did he meet him?

T: They met.

S: They did? When was that?

T: And he sent his men to Vang Pao's unit too. So Vang Pao is the [full front] fighting, fighting the Secret War, special force, fighting (--) So now the American pay Vang Pao to fight the Laos Communist. (S: Okay) They have Laos Communist. (S: Right) So they're using Vang Pao to be the front for United States behind, [name unclear] is behind those Special Secret War.

S: Okay. And when was this?

T: Still 1962.

S: 1962.

A: Any interesting stories that he has about Vang Pao? Personal stories with him, or that he knows.

T: Because they all like serve the United States. [Name unclear] and Vang Pao, they have to work together because they serve the United States interests. They are defenders of the kingdom, defenders of the countries, and so because American respect these two generals. Basically the bombing started when the [Isalat, Isalat] is the Liberation Army.

They call [Isalat,] is the Liberation Laos Army in the northern of three Province of Laos. So they bring the Vietnamese in to support them. So basically remember the treaty in 1947 that you know, that you have to return back to Vietnam? (S: Right) But they didn't. So they went to study and came back. And then these three Province of Northern of Laos, Phongsali, Sam Nua (--) Sam Nua, [Luang Nam Tha] and Phongsali are Liberation, is that belong to the [Isalat,] Laos Communist area. So they, they're the ones who bring Vietnamese in. That's the beginning of asking United States to bomb those areas.

S: Because they brought the Vietnamese Communist in to reinforce the Communism.
(T: Exactly) So.

T: So basically this is the largest bombing now. This is the largest bombing in Luang Nam Tha, Phongsali and Sam Nua. These are most [unclear] because Laos Isalat, Laos come and bring the North Vietnamese in to support fighting the American side, Kong Le and [name unclear]. So they have three parties, Neutral (--) So, so you still have a faction of three parties, Royalists, Neutrals and Rightists. Royalists are the Royal Army there for United States, Rightists is other groups, and Neutrals is still Kong Le, but they were outside, but still, while [unclear] still fighting then this three [unclear]. They still continue fighting again. So while these people are fighting, the Communist see the witness and they bring more and more, and more reinforcement from the United States. (S: Right) So they have more reinforcement from Thai, from Thailand as well. They know this, United States know that more Communist are coming in so they reinforce the Thai volunteer, what do you call, resurface, more [resurface] from Thailand now.

S: To help with the American? (T: Umhm)

A: So getting back to his individual story, what happened to him as all of this other stuff was happening?

T: He was a police officer until 1975.

S: Does he have any first hand accounts of performing or anything?

T: Now he saw more American soldiers are present in Laos.

S: Imprisoned?

T: More American soldiers are present in the capitals in whole countries. Beginning developing, more developing now. More American in, they went into help peoples, schools, hospitals, agricultures, propaganda to gain support from the people. Remember at the time the Vietnamese come in, they tried to get farms? Now the American family come in, you know, helping people, hospitals, agricultures, more to the poor.

A: So let's take that, all the political stuff that's going on at a big level, we need to get it down to his level. What was happening with him? Because we can read in the books about all of that stuff.

T: So in 1961 at this time he went to [Ban Na Kun]. [Ban Na Kun] is where he met his future wife here.

S: Okay. Can you talk (--)

T: So he met his wife there as a police officer at that town.

S: Now what's her name?

T: He was there for, until, he and (--) Basically while he was a police officer there he met this girl. She was young, thirteen years old, until 1964. So she met this young, she was (--) He was about eighteen years old, right, and she was about (--) So he was older, (S: Yah, because he was born in 1930,) he was about twenty. So he was about twenty and she was about thirteen.

S: Wouldn't he be in his 30s though, if he was born in 1930, and this was 1960 something?

T: Yah, he was about fourteen years difference.

S: Okay, right.

T: Yah, that's about right. (S: Okay) So she was young and he was old, and then eventually they get married when she was sixteen.

S: Okay. Now what year was that in?

T: 1964.

S: '64. Now what's her name?

T: [Tong Lali Lavong]

S: And did they start a family from there, like at that point, or?

T: So he stayed there. Between 1965, 66, he got a job. While he was there, his son three years old drowned, drowning right, and die. At some point he just felt painful. So he left [town unclear] his wife's hometown to Vientiane to take on the position as the prison job in Vientiane.

A: Was it a prison guard, or prison warden?

T: Prison guard.

A: Prison guard.

S: Did his wife go with him?

T: The whole family, him, his wife.

A: What was the name of the?

T: Samkhe. So now he moved to Vientiane [unclear] at this time in '66.

S: Okay.

A: And who was in the prison, and tell us about the conditions in the prisons?

T: At this time, remember it's still American, under United States, pay everything, the prison. He said everything is great. It was freedom, you know, (S: More money) more money, more democracy.

S: And who were the prisoners though? Were they Communist, were they just people who had done minor things, or ?

T: There's three different type of prison, prisoner. Political prisoner, drug addicts, murders, violence.

S: So they were all there?

T: All there. Just until 1967.

S: And what did he do from there? Where did he go next?

T: And he was, after 1967 he left Samkhe about a year and a half to [Ban Dong] [Pon Tong], Ban Dong, Pon Tong, as a police officer again.

S: So he went to a different town and he's still a police officer. He went to a different town.

T: He relocated after a year and a half from Samkhe, from the prison. This is when the bomb is happening at the same time, 1968. (S: 1968) When the United States see no political solution in the country.

S: Right, so they came in?

T: So they had to act on their own.

S: Okay. Before we get to him coming from there to here, can he just, is there anything else from that time that he'd like to share?

T: So there's the time of very, the civil war really heavy, between '68 to '75. What was I going to say about this?

S: Well I just (--) Before we get, jump from him leaving Laos to coming here, is there anything else he'd like to say that he wants, he wants us to know? Any other experiences during the Secret War that he wants to mention?

T: He said that you know, the war, we asked the United States to help, not taking the blame on the United States. We asked them to help. But because of the fracture of the countries split, and they have to ask for the help, because Laos [unclear] Vietnam, so Laos have to bring the United States. So it's the war, and he said you cannot blame, there's the Secret War. He said, you cannot blame the United States for bombing, because they're the one who bring the Vietnam, Vietnamese into the country. And then the Laos have to bring the United States to enforce that.

S: To help. Okay.

A: So back to his story again. He was a police officer from '66 to '75? He didn't go fight during that period?

T: That's it. His job is to protect the people as a police officer, not go to war.

A: And what happened when the Communist took over in '75? I should say what happened to him?

T: So during '75 the Communist still, he was still police office, but at the same time he, they asked him to recruit propaganda for the seize fire agreement 18, there's 18 agreements the Laos side seize fire, right? Because seize fire agreement, the 18 points. So he was one of the recruiters of the people to go out and say, "Hey, you know, there's 18 you know, place here is great," you know. And so he was reassigned to Ban [unclear]. Ban [unclear]. He was reassigned to the, what [unclear] does the (--) The policy and regulation of police officers. So it's like they call that regulation, policy, the rules and regulation about the police officers. That's what, he was reassigned to different station on the law side. So they reassign him to only oversee the police law.

S: In 1975.

T: Before 1975. So they reassign all, because they were now, they controlled country. They assign you.

S: So where did he go?

T: Stationed at [name unclear].

S: And how long was he there for?

T: He didn't go.

S: He didn't go? Okay, so what happened?

T: He doesn't, he don't like the Communist, so he didn't go.

S: Okay. So where did he go then?

T: So he did not go. He say, "I'm not going." So they arrested him and put him on the five year seminar. It's a concentration camp.

S: Who arrested him?

T: The Communist. For five years.

S: Five years, from '75 to '80?

A: Tell us about the conditions inside the camp?

T: Labor.

S: Labor camp? So where did he (--)

T: [Unclear], roads, some of that labor.

S: What did he have to do?

T: He say just clear the trees, make more roads.

S: How was he treated?

T: The Royals take off his, no more uniform, just prisoner of war. And that's the last day that he could (--). That's the last time that he wore a uniform.

S: So what did they make him wear instead?

T: Prisoner clothing.

S: What did it look like?

T: Just wear normal farmer clothes I think. Blacks and whites, maybe blues.

S: And where was this?

T: In Northern Laos.

S: Now where is his family at this time?

T: It's Northern of Laos.

S: Okay, where is his family at this time?

T: His wife is still in [Pon Tong] where he was stationed, the last station.

S: Umhm. And did they have more kids at that point too? [Cell phone rings]

T: Very similar to what he say, but he's more protest. Well the same thing [unclear], then you're going to be captured too. They're four children. [Liang; unclear].

A: Okay. So did he have any communication between him and his family at that time?

T: When he was in the seminar camp he had four children, and [name unclear] is born during that time. And he said at that time (--) By the time he was in seminar a total of eight children. And the 8th person born in seminar, [name unclear]. And then since then he came to United States in 1996. Do you want to ask him anything else?

S: Just, going back to the camp, what were the conditions like? Was he treated badly, was he treated okay, did they hurt him at all?

T: So they would have different division of seminar camp. If you are a high rank officer, you were in a different place, because he was in the medical, (S: Right) and also a police officer. So he was in the other camp, other seminar camp. Like the seminar camp number 05, 06 something.

S: 05, 06? Okay. And that's when he was doing manual labor, right?

T: Yup, that sort of stuff. They, generally his seminar, that's about 30 people that they, they were killed because they believe [to be uprising against them]. So they pretty much (--) So the people inside the camp were part of you know, the Communist, but they pretend to be prisoner. So they know the plan. So they just take 30 people and kill them. So they sent him back to Van Vieng in a still Liberation [unclear]. So now they moved from the [unclear] camp. Two different sets of camp, (S: Okay) Van Vieng, and that's when he request for (--) So they call different unit. [Unclear] means a thousand. So there were about a 1000 concentration prisoners there.

S: Prisoners, okay, at the second place.

T: So you know, there's, there's a camp they call 1000 because those are high rank, different rank of officers.

S: Okay. So what happened after that? Was he released?

T: Van Vieng is more like village now. So now Van Vieng is like a village. (S: Okay)
But still in the [wood].

S: He was still under their control though.

T: Yes, still in the wood, but it's more in the wood. They put him in the wood, you know, but not really in the camp. But there was, you know, the whole [unclear] of that wood area is [unclear] away from the town, away from the village.

S: Was his family there with him, or were they away still?

T: He request his wife to live with him.

S: Okay.

T: Everybody go live with him.

S: Okay. [Looking at photo of wife]

T: Yah, [name unclear] was born there when they were moved, request to stay with him.

S: At that place? Okay.

T: So it's more like, it's the wood [unclear], a Liberation [unclear], but they put you in the middle of nowhere in the woods.

S: Okay. So you have to fend for yourself basically.

T: Yah, umhm, small house.

S: So he and his family were there until '85?

T: About four years.

S: Okay. So when did he come to the United States then? You said '96?

T: Until 1981, (S: Okay) and then they just left.

S: They just left.

T: Fled.

S: Okay, and where did they go to?

T: Go to Thailand, everyone.

S: Thailand? Did they have to go at night, secretly, or?

T: '81 he fled, but they left his family back home.

S: Um, okay. So he went by himself to Thailand.

T: Umhm. [Unclear] come, that's why he left his wife there at the other camp.

S: Umhm. When did they join him?

T: In the beginning of the year January 1981, he wrote a letter to, he left a letter to, with his wife's sister to say that you know, he left the country. And so he asked to leave as well. So they came.

S: Okay. So his wife and kids joined them in '81, eventually. Something like that, okay. And then how long were they in Thailand for?

T: Basically he (--) Basically he, during 1981 he went back to get his elder sister and young sisters, and then, and his wife joined him in 1981, and they both stayed in the camp for seven months. His wife came to the United States in 1986. But him he left behind to go get his young sister until 1996.

S: 1996? (T: '96) So his wife came over here in '86, and ten years later he finally joined her?

T: Because the reason they don't come together is because he has to go back and get the (S: To get the family) younger sister.

S: His sister?

T: Umhm, his sister.

S: Okay. Now did his wife (--)

T: And he fought with the other people and then he got arrested.

S: Um, okay.

T: The reason he got arrested is because he went back and fought with them. He got arrested.

S: Fought with who?

T: They thought him would go back to take over, recapture Vientiane. So they arrested him.

S: Who did he fight against though?

T: So they thought he was going back to recruit, you know, so they arrested him and they send him to (--) So basically he was there for years. At the same time they don't have the evidence against him of plotting the country of Vientiane. So they sentenced him for twenty-five years.

S: Twenty-five years?

T: So they will charge him eleven years. He tried to escape once, and then recaptured again. [Laughs]

S: Oh no!

T: You know? So.

S: You can't blame him. So how long did he serve?

T: Basically he served eleven years, but on the eleven years there's somebody from his hometown, Tha Khaek, who worked as the Head of the prison of Samkhe. Remember he worked at the Samkhe, remember that. So he had a track record that he was one of the officers in Samkhe too. So then came this guy you know, named [Kom Pong] who used to be in the same town with him, Tha Khaek, and then he said, "Hey, that's my big brother. You know, why you put my big brother in jail?" [S: Chuckles] So that's [unclear]. He swapped the name. That year they're going to release that person's name, but he swapped the name. To be, pretend to be his name.

S: To be whose name?

T: The other prisoner. He was supposed to be released as well too. (S: Okay) But Kom Pong changed the name into his name.

S: Oh, okay. Okay. And that's how he got out?

T: And then changed the, changed the birth, and they changed the birth, changed the citizenship name.

S: So who did he say he was then?

T: Same name but different last name.

S: Oh, okay. Does he remember what the last name was?

T: He did not put the last name, only the first name.

S: Oh, he just put the first name. And what year was that in?

T: 1992.

S: Okay.

T: 1992-96 he stayed with young sister after he left. He went to help, and remember he studied medicine at the same time (S: Right) in hospitals. So he went to help people.

S: For those four years he was helping people in the village or whatever.

T: So basically one of his daughters, [unclear]. Everybody thought he died already.

S: Oh! His family you mean?

T: Umhm, because he stayed with his young sister. Remember he stayed with his young sister, but they still have contact. 1992 they can call. So they still have contact with the USA. So when they talk the young sister told the people, told the older sister over here said, "Your father is alive!" But his daughter, his youngest daughter than his other young daughters heard the telephone, said that his father is still alive, right. So, and then they tried to petition him to come to United States. (S: Okay) But they thought they will die already. But they don't want their son or daughter to hear, to know that their father is alive. So they kind of like (--)

S: Who didn't want his kids to know he was alive?

T: His wife don't want his kids to know that he's still alive. (S: Why?) Too many thing, it's been a long time. Too many things. Too many long time. They thought they die already, you know.

S: And she had been raising them all.

T: Yes, alone.

S: And how many? There are eight kids?

T: There's nine kids.

S: Nine kids that she had over here by herself.

T: Umhm.

S: So he went over in 1996 finally, after (--)

T: After one of his daughters petitioned him to come to the United States.

S: Right. And so he came over and moved in back with his family?

T: Yup.

S: Okay. Was it here in Lowell, or was it somewhere else?

T: He came July 21, 1996. Yes, direct to here.

S: To right here. His family was already here. So he didn't have a sponsor. He just came and moved in.

T: Right, right, the kids are here. See then he did not go to the camp, but he went in the camp, but he went back. (S: Yah) And then he went back, then they arrested him, you know, and then finally he have a chance to get out.

S: He worked his way out after (--)

T: All his life he's tried to (--)

S: Get out of the situation. [Laughs] And he did!

T: Yes, get out of the situation, and he did, all the way. You see that, the story, he tried to survive that. The will was to survive.

S: Yes, very, very inspiring. So he's been here since then. Has he gone back to Laos at all?

T: But before he came he told the US Ambassador the stories behind that. So he told the Ambassador that, well you know I went to you know, concentration camp [unclear].

S: Wow.

T: So then the Ambassador, "Raise your hand," and then that's it. (S: And he let him) Off to the United States.

S: Oh, he let him come back over.

T: They have, I think they have all the records.

S: Yah, they probably felt bad. Wow. What did he do here for (--) Did he work when he came here?

T: He came, according what he said, he came when he was 66 years old. But he went to work you know. (S: Where?) Retired. (S: Retired?) [Unclear] So basically he came here because (--)

S: He spent time with his family finally.

T: And the daughters just have to take care of his father. Well 66 years old, he supposed to retire. Okay, so they (--)

S: So they take care of him too.

T: Yah, yah.

S: All right. Great.

T: Right now 78 years old.

S: Right.

T: 78 is coming he said.

S: Almost. [Chuckle] All right. Well (--)

T: It's a long, it's a good story.

S: It's quite a story.

T: And compared to other guy yesterday.

Interview ends.